CHAPTER VI

POLITICAL WEAKNESS BUT CULTURAL BRILLIANCE: THE FIVE DYNASTIES (A.D. 907-960) AND THE SUNG DYNASTY (A.D. 960-1279)

INTRODUCTORY

THE collapse of the T'ang was followed by internal division and civil strife. For more than half a century the Empire was divided among many petty states, some of them dominated hy rulers of alien extraction. When, in the latter half of the tenth century, a family of the older native stock once more united most of China proper, the political recovery was not complete: part of the Empire which had been traditionally Chinese and whose population was predominantly so remained in the hands of foreigners. Eventually most of the earlier seats of Chinese culture passed into the control of invaders from the North and only the Yangtze Valley and the South continued to be under Chinese princes. In the latter part of the thirteenth century all China became part of the great Mongol Empire. Not until the second half of the fourteenth century did a native dynasty succeed in effectively asserting its authority over all of the country which because of its population and culture could rightly be called Chinese. As before the Sui and the T'ang, so now after the T'ang, the Empire was again, and this time for nearly five centuries rather than a little less than four, partly or entirely under the heel of conquering outsiders.

This long period of partial or complete subjection to foreigners was not, however, marked by as much political

weakness and extended anarchy as the earlier one had been. The Sung dynasty, which held the throne from 960 to 1279—or for over half the time—was stronger than any of the dynasties, Chinese or foreign, between the Han and the Sui. The years, moreover, registered much greater achievement in civilization than did those of the